Forest Service

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File Code: 3420 **Date:** October 23, 2008
Route To:

Subject: Proposed FY 2009 Forest Health Project, Camino Real RD

To: Forest Supervisor, Carson National Forest

On October 21, Dave Conklin of our staff met with Paul Czeszynski (Camino Real RD) to examine potential FY 2009 Forest Health project areas on the Carson NF. Walkthroughs were conducted in three stands within the La Jara project area, near Palo Flechado Pass.

Stand 401970-0008, 174 acres

Of the three stands examined, this one was selected as the best candidate for a Forest Health-funded project, and so is described in the most detail here:

This dense mixed-conifer stand is located just south of Palo Flechado Pass, with much of it visible from scenic Highway 64. Douglas-fir comprises the majority of conifers, and white fir is also a major component. Ponderosa pine, white (limber) pine, spruce, and corkbark fir are all minor components. Aspen is intermixed with the conifers throughout most of the stand, and comprises about 25% of the total basal area. Average BA for all trees is about 160 ft^2 per acre. The last entry here was a selective harvest more than 50 years ago. Site quality is good.

Douglas-fir dwarf mistletoe and western spruce budworm have been the two most significant forest pests in this stand. It appeared that the mistletoe was present in at least 30 to 40 percent of the area. Limited amounts of Douglas-fir bark beetle and fir engraver beetle activity have occurred in recent years, and stand densities are conducive to additional activity. The existing understory has sustained light to fairly heavy budworm damage the past several years.

The Environmental Assessment (EA) calls for thinning conifers up to 12" dbh in this stand. Average spacing would be about 20 feet, but spacing would be highly variable to retain the healthiest and best-formed trees (as constrained by the diameter limit), and provide a more irregular structure. Treatment would improve the growth and vigor of the remaining trees, reducing bark beetle susceptibility. Understory densities would be reduced greatly, with budworm damaged and mistletoe-infected trees removed. White pine and ponderosa pine, where present, should be the preferred conifers for retention. One of the greatest overall benefits of treatment here would be reduced competition for the aspen--generally all conifers (at least those < 12" dbh) within 20 feet of an aspen would be cut.

An old road system accesses portions of this stand, and the EA calls for road construction (and/or reconstruction), for the purpose of fire mitigation in this area. Timely road work here would reduce treatment cost and allow public access for firewood gathering following thinning.

Removal of the larger cut material seems vital in regard to reducing fuels and fire hazard, a primary objective for the La Jara project area. Surface fuel-loading is already high in portions of this stand. The (potentially) good accessibility of this stand is one of the main reasons we support treatment here.

Stand 401850-0007, 74 acres

This is a long, narrow stand along the west-facing slope of La Jara Canyon, opposite a portion of the FY 2008 Forest Health-funded project (see our 3420 letter of June 18, 2008). This is a somewhat drier and less productive mixed conifer stand than the one described above. There is a higher proportion of limber and ponderosa pine here, much more blue spruce, and much less white fir and aspen. Average BA is about 150 ft^2 per acre. Although this stand could benefit silviculturally from a planned thinning of trees < 9' dbh (as per EA), accessibility is poor. Presumably all cut material would remain on the site.

Stand 401960-0010, 183 acres

This dense mixed conifer stand lies close to the southern boundary of the Taos Pueblo. Because of poor accessibility and limited potential for removing firewood or other products, we consider it a low priority for a Forest Health-funded project.

Please contact Dave Conklin at (505) 842-3288 if you have questions about this evaluation.

/s/ Debra Allen-Reid
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